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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 001731

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: CATHOLIC CHURCH ANTI-TIP EFFORTS IN MALAYSIA

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 1640 - TRAFFICKING ON LABUAN

[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 1557 - POLICE DISCUSS TIP

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Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) The Catholic Church in Malaysia is taking a more active role in providing shelter to suspected trafficking victims and raising public awareness. The Church is raising public awareness via Sunday homilies and public outreach, and provides temporary shelter to women reportedly forced into prostitution in East Malaysia. Beyond trafficking, the Church has assisted migrant workers, including a group of 300 Bangladeshi migrant workers stranded in Malaysia. In Sabah, the Church, in cooperation with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), developed an anti-trafficking program with the objective to build trust and cooperation between state and local leaders in Sabah and Indonesia's East Kalimantan province. Post strongly supports Department funding for the ICMC project. End Summary.

Church Takes More Active Role

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Catholic Church in Malaysia is taking a more active role in assisting victims of trafficking and increasing public awareness. Beginning in September, parish priests began focusing Sunday homilies on the plight of refugees, migrant workers, and victims of trafficking. Articles in Catholic newspapers, such as the weekly Herald, also regularly include articles highlighting human rights and trafficking issues. The Church also is actively working with local NGOs and diplomatic missions to assist in the sheltering of victims while they await repatriation.

Archdiocese in Sarawak Concerned About Labor Trafficking

[1](#)3. (SBU) Poloff met in October with Bishop John Ha, whose diocese covers the southern third of Sarawak. Father Simon, who oversees the diocese human rights outreach program, also participated in the meeting. Sarawak is a Malaysian state located on Borneo and suspected traffickers reportedly use border crossings there to transit persons from Indonesia. Bishop John, while admitting not to be an expert, said he suspects local "gangsters" working in loose business partnerships with organized syndicates within source countries, such as Indonesia and China, are the primary traffickers. He voiced his concern that some unscrupulous employment agents operated freely at land border crossings

and used deception to recruit people (ref B). Bishop John believes that trafficking for the sex trade in Sarawak is limited due to the state's low population (2,357,000 as of December 2006) spread throughout 77,330 square miles, or roughly 30 persons per square mile. He surmised that some women transiting through Sarawak to West Malaysia and beyond maybe trafficked into prostitution. Bishop John thought that trafficking to meet labor demands of logging camps and plantations might be a greater problem in Sarawak, as workers sometimes become bonded laborers and lose their freedom to change or leave jobs.

14. (SBU) Fr. Simon stated that the diocese assists suspected trafficking victims on an ad hoc basis. When women are brought to the Church's attention, a convent run by Sisters of the Good Shepherd houses them until they are ready for repatriation. Five Filipinas, repatriated in September, represented the most recent cases of suspected TIP victims safe-housed at the convent. The Bishop is not concerned about retaliation from "gangsters" because the number of suspected TIP-victims safe-housed remains comparatively small and does not substantially economically affect illicit syndicates.

Sabah Archdiocese Proactively Fighting Trafficking

15. (SBU) Poloff met with Dominic Lim, Director of the Human Development Committee for the Diocese of Kota Kinabalu, in Sabah, Malaysia. The diocese is working with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) to develop bilateral cooperation between local Malaysian and Indonesian authorities. The Archbishop and diocese leadership are actively seeking new methods to curb trafficking activities in Sabah. They want to engage state and local leaders in Sabah and Indonesia's neighboring East Kalimantan province with the objective to increase cooperation. The Diocese believes that interstate cooperation is the most effective

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method available to reduce trafficking.

16. (SBU) Mr. Lim stated that some migrant workers brought into Sabah from East Kalimantan as cheap labor for plantations and lumber camps fall victim to trafficking. Mr. Lim noted traffickers are suspected of transporting Filipina women into Sabah and onward to Labuan, West Malaysia, and other regional destinations for prostitution (ref A). As in Sarawak, the diocese uses a convent run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd's as a safehouse for suspected TIP victims. Mr. Lim believes that as cooperation and trust are established between the police and other agencies responsible for implementing the new anti-TIP law, the shelter can assist police by offering a secure place for victims willing to testify in court. He said most victims are afraid to testify because of possible retaliation from the criminal the syndicates. (Note: Sabah's police commissioner lamented to Poloff, during a subsequent meeting, about witnesses refusing to testify. He stated this often resulted in police lacking sufficient evidence to charge suspected "gangsters." End Note.)

17. (SBU) For the last three years, the diocese has worked to increase public awareness on the dangers of trafficking. Mr. Lim explained there are instances when local women, especially from rural areas, are "tricked" into leaving Sabah for jobs offered in West Malaysia and Singapore; instead, the women are forced into prostitution. The diocese is concerned that some repatriated victims become social pariahs because of prostitution's stigma. Rejected by their community as "damaged goods", some return to "immoral activities." The diocese hopes to get people talking about trafficking rather than avoiding the topic.

Church Shelters Bangladeshi Workers

18. (U) Beyond trafficking, the Catholic Church also has assisted migrant workers in need. Earlier this year, a group of 300 Bangladeshi workers became stranded in Malaysia when the jobs they expected to find failed to materialize. The group paid employment agents in Bangladesh an average of \$3,430 (12,000 Ringgit) to secure well-paying jobs in Malaysia, but arrived and found they had been duped. After six months of trying to work and survive, the group went to the Bangladeshi High Commission seeking help. Officials there told them they lacked the resources to cope with their problem. Tenaganita, a local NGO that assists migrant workers and suspected TIP victims, called Father Leonard John, parish priest for the Church of St. Jude after they became aware of the workers' plight. Together with the Parish Integral Human Development committee (PIHD), he quickly coordinated temporary shelter for 82 workers, all Muslims, on St. Jude's property while Tenaganita arranged for housing that is more permanent while awaiting repatriation.

19. (SBU) Tenaganita reportedly pressured the Government of Bangladesh to intervene on behalf of the stranded workers. Because of Tenaganita's intervention, the GOB is ensuring that employment agents reimburse each worker the money they initially paid to secure the nonexistent jobs. In the wake of this high profile case, the Bangladeshi High Commission announced in December that it raised about \$95,000 (300,000 Ringgit) to build and operate a shelter for migrant workers.

Comment

10. (SBU) The Catholic Church is concerned about trafficking issues in Malaysia and is beginning to take a more active and overt role in confronting the problem. The Church, influential in Sabah and Sarawak with their majority Christian populations, is well placed to influence civil society in East Malaysia and build bridges on the state and local level. Post strongly supports the ICMC proposal for activities in Sabah and East Kalimantan and appreciates Washington's efforts to fund this promising initiative.
KEITH